

Statement of Congressman James Comer

March 27, 2019

Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Subcommittee Member Day

Chairwoman McCollum, Ranking Member Joyce, Chairwoman Lowey, Ranking Member Granger, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. I appreciate the Appropriations Committee allowing members from outside the committee to weigh in on their funding priorities as you craft the next fiscal year's appropriations.

Today, I'm here to highlight an issue that is a problem threatening not just my congressional district, but our entire inland waterways system. That threat is Asian carp.

As many of you know, the term "Asian carp" refers to four species of non-native fish – bighead, silver, black and grass carp. These species were brought to the United States decades ago, soon entered our major waterways, and have since spread to a considerable portion of our country's interior river system.

Lake Barkley and Kentucky Lake in my congressional district are home to some of the top outdoor recreational sites in all of Kentucky. Boating, camping, fishing, and other activities have an estimated \$1.2 billion economic impact on the region. However, Asian carp threaten that economy. These invasive fish are known to jump out of the water at the sound of approaching boats, striking boaters and skiers. They also eat the food sources of native fish species. All of this is driving boaters and fishers away from our region. As an example, Asian carp are ruining the annual fishing tournaments that draw hundreds of visitors to the area and infuse millions of dollars into the local economy.

Last year, I held a field briefing to discuss this subject in Kuttawa, Kentucky. Over 400 constituents attended and wrote letters to express their concern over the destruction caused by Asian carp. The community sent a clear message: Asian carp are inflicting serious damage on local tourism and threatening our hotels, restaurants, bait shops, restaurants, and numerous other small businesses.

This isn't a problem just in Kentucky. For years funding to combat the threat posed by Asian carp has been focused on preventing their spread into the Great Lakes with hundreds of millions dedicated to stopping their spread. However, little funding has been appropriated to controlling and eradicating Asian carp where they already are.

Lakes and reservoirs throughout the Southeast are facing similar threats from Asian carp and members from Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi and Alabama all share a growing concern for our waterways.

State agencies utilize state Aquatic Nuisance Species (ANS) plans to combat the spread of invasive species in their waterways. In FY2018 we appropriated \$2 million for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to support these plans. However, when that funding is distributed amongst the states that comes out to about \$47,000 per state. To better support state-based

efforts, I am asking for \$4.4 million appropriated to support state ANS plans. That would allow for \$100,000 per state.

In FY2019, \$11 million in USFWS funding was dedicated to controlling and eradicating Asian carp. My constituents are grateful for that start, but I believe we can do more. That is why I request \$25 million in funding for USFWS for carp management and report language to clarify that all our nation's river system is eligible for that funding, not just the Upper Mississippi River.

Again, thank you for your time today. I look forward to working with you to fund our ongoing War on Carp and I'm happy to address any questions you might have.